Stirner's Critics

Max Stirner

1845

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Translator's Preface

Working on this translation has been a pleasurable challenge for me. Stirner uses straightforward, even fairly simple language, filled with passion and sarcasm, to express ideas that are difficult, though more in the fact that very few people would want to accept their implications than in their complexity. In wrestling with this work, I have had to make decisions about how best to get Stirner's thinking across in English. The purpose of this preface is to explain some of those decisions.

One of the central terms in Stirner's thinking is "*der Einzige*." I have chosen to translate this as "the unique." Some have argued in favor of leaving this noun in German, and I understand their point, but in this text Stirner frequently connects the noun *Einzige* with the adjective *einzige*, and this connection would be lost if I left the noun in German. In addition, I think that leaving *Einzige* in German would give the text a more academic feeling, as if Stirner were inventing a specialized language, which he is not. For Stirner, *Einzige* is simply a name to use for something that is beyond definition, something that is unspeakable, so I decided not to translate it as "the unique one." Such a translation would imply that "unique" says something *definitive* about some *one*, rather than merely being a name pointing toward something unsayable. I think that, in "the unique," the fact that it is meant to be a mere name for something beyond language is made clearer. Because Stirner compares his use of "*der Einzige*" to the way one uses proper names, such as "Ludwig," knowing perfectly well that the word Ludwig tells you nothing about the person so designated, and yet indicates clearly *who* you are talking about if those to whom you speak know Ludwig, I considered capitalizing "unique" as a proper name is capitalized, but have chosen not to do so for fear that some would instead read it as presenting the unique as an ideal, a higher reality, rather than simply as you and I in the here and now. In light of all this, I choose to translate the title of Stirner's book as *The Unique and Its Own*[1], a more correct translation than the current English title (*The Ego and Its Own*).

I decided to keep leave all references to page numbers of citations from *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* as they were — reflecting the page numbers in the original edition of the book. I also translated these citations directly, rather than going to Byington's translation either in its original form or in the version edited by David Leopold (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). I did this because I wanted to maintain a consistency in language between what Stirner has written here and his citations from his earlier book and to guarantee that Stirner's references to various philosophical, political and theological ideas of his time were not lost. I also hope that someone will find the time to do an improved English translation of Stirner's major work in the near future.

Though Stirner does not invent a specialized language, his writings spring out of the context of the debates of the young Hegelians and other German philosophical and social radicals of the times. Thus, Stirner uses certain terms in Hegelian (or anti-Hegelian) ways. I have chosen to translate these terms as consistently as a good, readable translation would allow.[2] I want to mention a few of these. In English translations of Hegelian works, "*Begriff*" is generally either

[1] However, outside of the title of Stirner's book, I have chosen to translate the word "*Eigentum*" as "property." The word can also translate as "possession" as in the phrase "to acquire possession of the book" or as "ownership." It is useful to keep all these translations in mind when you read the word "property" in this text.

[2] I made use of the following online glossaries of Hegelian terminology for this purpose: www.london.ac.uk; www.class.uidaho.edu; web.mac.com

translated as "notion" or "concept." I have chosen the latter translation, because it allows some of Stirner's word play to appear more clearly in English. I have translated "*Entfremden*" as "alienation" although "estrangement" is an equally acceptable translation. I felt that my choice has more meaning to those likely to read this translation, within the context of present-day radical theoretical endeavors. In Hegelian usage, "*Wesen*" is translated as "essence." In addition, in its frequent usage with "*Mensch*," which itself can be translated as "human being" or merely "human," it is clearly a reference to the species "essence" which Stirner's critics claim to be inherent in the human being. Stirner turns this idea on its head in an interesting way by arguing that the real essence of each individual is, in fact, his or her concrete, actual, inconceivable, unspeakable, unique being in the immediate moment, the very opposite of the way Hegel and the other young Hegelians conceived it. Although the word "*Meinung*" only appears four times in this text, it is significant in Hegelian thought. The word is often translated as "opinion," though it can also be translated as "view," "judgment," or "estimation." Hegel "often stresses the etymological link with *mein* ('mine')," [3] and Stirner is likely to have found it amusing. For Hegel, *Meinung* was merely of use for distinguishing particulars and was thus of no significance to universal Reason or universal Thought. For Stirner, these universals were spooks, and particulars (and more specifically *myself* in particular) were what mattered. So *Meinung* is how you and I actually experience out world, or to put it more simply, each of us experiences it from our own *point of view*. To emphasize this, I have chosen to translate *Meinung* as "view" in this text.

There are a few other choices I made in translation that I think need some comment. "*Mensch*" can be translated either as "person" or "human being." In this text, Stirner uses it in the context of his critique of humanism, and so I decided it made the most sense to translate it as "human being." In a couple of passages in this text, Stirner contrasts "*Mensch*" to "*Unmensch*." In Byington's translation of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*, he chose to simply translate the latter word as "unman." But in German, the word refers to a "monster," and knowing Stirner's enjoyment of playing with words and ideas in ways that are likely to get the goat of his opponents, I think that he most likely meant just that. To further emphasize Stirner's intent of contrasting this with the abstract, conceptual *human* being, I chose to translate the term as "*inhuman* monster." This leads to such delightful statements as: "You are an inhuman monster, and this is why you are completely human, a real and actual human being, a complete human being."

The German word "*Prädikat*" could be translated as "predicate" or "attribute" (among other possibilities). In this text, Stirner uses it specifically in reference to god or to humanity as the new god. Thus, he is using it in an anti-*theological* sense rather than a grammatical sense. I have thus chosen to use the theological term "attribute" rather than the grammatical term "predicate" to translate it.

The word "*Vorstellung*" only appears twice in this work, and in both instances it is in reference to the ways that Stirner's opponents chose to depict egoism. Though "*Vorstellung*" is often translated into English as "representation," it has a far more active connotation than this English word. It is more an active depiction or conceptualization that one is inventing. Certainly this what Stirner is saying about his opponents. Thus, I have translated the word as "depiction" here.

[3] G. W. F. Hegel, Théodore F. Geraets (translator), Wallis Arthur Suchting (translator), Henry Silton Harris (translator) *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (Indianapolis, 1991), in "Notes to Glossary," p. 351.

There is a passage in which Stirner criticizes "*Bedenken*." One can translate this word as "qualms," "scruples," "misgiving," or "doubts." In this text, it is obvious that he is talking about moral scruples. In the context, Stirner uses a couple of other words in ways rather different from their usual present-day meanings. He uses "*Bedenklichkeit*" and "*Unbedenklichkeit*" in ways that in the context only make sense if they are translated as "scrupulousness" for the former word and "unscrupulousness" or "lack of scruples" for the latter. But in present-day German "*Bedenklichkeit*" is usually translated as "seriousness," "precariousness" or "anxiety"; and "*Unbedanklichkeit*" is usually translated as "harmlessness." Since in this passage, Stirner plays a lot on "*Bedenken*," "*Denken*" and *"Gedenken*" (wordplay sadly lost in translation), it is possible that he was also playing with these other two terms — implying that scrupulousness causes anxiety and that a lack of scruples is harmless compared to the moral dogmas of scrupulousness. In any case, I chose translate the words in the way that would make sense in context, as "scrupulousness" for the first word, and "unscrupulousness" or "lack of scruples" for the second.

Finally, I want to say that translating this work has been an act of egoistic love. I wanted to see a full English translation of it, and took the tools and means in hand to create it. I have had much enjoyment in doing so.

Wolfi Landstreicher

Stirner's critics
by Max Stirner

The following three notable writings have come out against *The Unique and Its Own*:

1. Szeliga's critique in the March edition of the "Northern German Gazette";
2. "On *The Essence of Christianity* in Relation to *The Unique and Its Own*" in the latest volume of *Wigand's Quarterly Review*;
3. A pamphlet, "The Last Philosophers" by M. Hess.

Szeliga presents himself as a critic, Hess as a socialist and the author of the second piece as Feuerbach.

A brief response might be useful, if not to the critics mentioned above, at least to some other readers of the book.

The three opponents are in agreement about the terms that draw the most attention in Stirner's book, i.e., the "unique" and "egoist." It will therefore be very useful to take advantage of this unity and first of all discuss the points mentioned.

Szeliga, after first having in all seriousness allowed the unique "to become" and identified it with a "man" (page 4: "The unique wasn't always unique, nor always a man, but was once a baby and then a young boy"), makes him an "individual of world history" and finally, after a definition of spooks (from which it emerges that "a spirit lacking thought is a body, and that the pure and simple body is the absence of thought"), he finds that the unique is "*therefore* the spook of spooks." It is true that he adds, "For the critic who doesn't just see in universal history fixed ideas replacing each other, but creative thoughts continually developing, for the critic, however, the unique is not a spook, but an act of creative self-consciousness, which had to arise in its time, in *our* time, and fulfill its determined task"; but this act is merely a "thought," a "principle" and a book.

When Feuerbach deals with the unique, he limits himself to considering it as a "unique individual," chosen from a class or species and "opposed as sacred and inviolable to other individuals." In this choosing and opposing "the essence of religion remains. This man, this unique, this incomparable being, this Jesus Christ, is only and exclusively God. This oak, this place, this bull, this day is sacred, not the others." He concludes: "Chase the Unique in Heaven from your head, but also chase away the Unique on earth."

Hess strictly only alludes to the unique. He first identifies Stirner with the unique, and then says of the Unique: "He is the headless, heartless trunk, i.e., he has the illusion of being so, because in reality he doesn't just lack spirit, but body as well; he is nothing other than his illusions." And finally he pronounces his judgment on Stirner, "the unique": "He is boasting."

From this, the unique appears as "the spook of all spooks," as "the sacred individual, which one must chase from the head" and as the "pale boaster."

Stirner names the unique and says at the same time that "Names don't name it." He utters a name when he names the unique, and adds that the unique is only a name. So he thinks something other than what he says, just as, for example, when someone calls you Ludwig, he isn't thinking of a generic Ludwig, but of *you*, for whom he has no word.

What Stirner *says* is a word, a thought, a concept; what he *means* is neither a word, nor a thought, nor a concept. What he says is not the meaning, and what he means cannot be said.

One flattered oneself that one spoke about the "actual, individual" human being when one spoke of the human being; but was this possible so long as one wanted to express *this* human being through something *universal*, through an attribute? To designate *this* human being, shouldn't one, perhaps, have recourse not to an attribute, but rather to a designation, to a name to take refuge in, where the view, i.e., the *unspeakable*, is the main thing? Some are reassured by "real, complete individuality," which is still not free of the relation to the species; others by the "spirit," which is likewise a *determination*, not complete *indeterminacy*. This indeterminacy only seems to be achieved in the unique, because it is given as the *specific* unique being, because when it is grasped as a *concept*, i.e., as an expression, it appears as a completely empty and undetermined name, and thus refers to a content *outside of* or *beyond* the concept. If one *fixes* it as a concept — and the opponents do this — one must attempt to give it a *definition* and will thus inevitably come upon something different from what was *meant*. It would be distinguished from other *concepts* and considered, for example, as "the sole complete individual," so that it becomes easy to show it as nonsense. But can you define yourself; are you a concept?

The "human being," as a concept or an attribute, does not exhaust *you*, because it has a conceptual content of its own, because it says *what* is human and *what* a human being is, i.e., because it is capable of being defined so that *you* can remain completely out of play. Of course, you *as a human being* still have your part in the conceptual content of the human being, but you don't have it *as you*. The unique, however, has no content; it is indeterminacy in itself; only *through you* does it acquire content and determination. There is no conceptual development of the unique, one cannot build a philosophical system with it as a "principle," the way one can with being, with thought, with the I. Rather it puts an end to *all conceptual development*. Anyone who considers it a principle, thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and inevitably takes useless potshots against it. Being, thought, the I, are only *undetermined* concepts, which receive their determinateness only through other concepts, i.e., through conceptual development. The unique, on the other hand, is a concept *that lacks determination* and cannot be made determinate by other concepts or receive a "nearer content"; it is not the "principle of a series of concepts," but a word or concept that, as word or concept, is not capable of any development. The development of the unique is your self-development and my self-development, an *utterly unique* development, because *your* development is not at all *my* development. Only as a concept, i.e., only as "development," are they one and the same; on the contrary, your development is just as distinct and unique as mine.

Since *you* are the content of the unique, there is no more to think about a *specific* content of the unique, i.e., a conceptual content.

What you are cannot be said through the word unique, just as by christening you with the name Ludwig, one doesn't intend to say what you are.

With the unique, the rule of *absolute thought*, of thought with a conceptual content of its own, comes to an end, just as the concept and the conceptual world fades away when one uses the empty name: the name is the empty name to which only the view can give content.

But it is not true, as Stirner's opponents present it, that in the unique there is only the "lie of what has been called the egoistic world up to now"; no, in its nakedness and its barrenness, in its shameless "candor," (see Szeliga, p. 34) the nakedness and barrenness of concepts and ideas come to light, the useless pomposity of its opponents is made clear. It becomes obvious that the biggest "*phrase*" is the one that seems to be the word most full of content. The unique is the frank, undeniable, clear — phrase; it is the keystone of our phrase-world, this world whose "beginning was the *word*."

The unique is an expression with which, in all frankness and honesty, one recognizes that he is expressing nothing. Human being, spirit, the true individual, personality, etc. are expressions or attributes that are full to overflowing with content, phrases with the greatest wealth of ideas; compared with these sacred and noble phrases, the unique is the empty, unassuming and completely common phrase.

The critics suspected something of the sort about the unique; they treated it as a phrase. But they considered the unique as if it claimed to be a sacred and noble phrase, and they disputed this claim. But it wasn't meant to be anything more than a common phrase, and therefore actual, which the inflated phrases of its opponents can never be, and therefore a desecration of phrase-making.

The unique is a word, and everyone should always be able to *think* something when he uses a word; a word should have thought content. But the unique is a *thoughtless* word; it has no thought content. So then what is its content, if it is not thought? It is content that cannot exist a second time and so also cannot be *expressed*, because if it could be expressed, actually and wholly expressed, it would exist for a second time; it would exist in the "expression."

Since the content of the unique is not thought content, the unique cannot be thought or said; but since it cannot be said, it, this perfect phrase, is *not even a phrase*.

Only when *nothing* is said about you and you are merely *named*, are you recognized as you. As soon as *something* is said about you, you are only recognized as that thing (human, spirit, christian, etc.). But the unique doesn't say anything because it is merely a name: it says only that you are you and nothing but you, that you are a *unique* you, or rather your self. Therefore, you have no attribute, but with this you are at the same time without determination, vocation, laws, etc.

Speculation was directed toward finding an attribute so *universal* that *everyone* would be understood in it. However, such an attribute wasn't supposed to express in each instance what each one *should* be, but rather what he *is*. Therefore, if "human" was this attribute, one shouldn't mean by it something that everyone has to become, since otherwise all the things that one has not yet become would be excluded, but something that everyone is. Now, "human" also actually expresses *what* everyone is. But this *What* is an expression for what is *universal* in everyone, for what everyone has in common with each other, so it isn't an expression for "everyone," it doesn't express *who* everyone is. Are you thoroughly defined when one says you are a human being? Has one expressed *who* you are completely? Does the attribute, "human," fulfill the task of the attribute, which is to express the subject *completely*, or doesn't it, on the contrary, completely take subjectivity away from the subject, and doesn't it say what the subject is rather than saying who he is?

Therefore, if the attribute should include *everyone* in itself, everyone should appear as subject, i.e., not only as *what* he is, but as *who* he is.

But how can you present yourself as who you are, if you don't present yourself? Are you a doppelganger or do you exist only once? You are nowhere except in yourself, you are not in the world a second time, you are unique. You can emerge only if you appear *in the flesh*.

"You are unique," isn't this a sentence? If in the sentence "you are human," you don't come in as the one *who* you are, do you actually come in as you in the sentence "you are unique"? The sentence "you are unique" means nothing but "you are you," a sentence that logic calls nonsense, because it doesn't make judgments on anything, it doesn't say anything, because it is empty, a sentence that is not a sentence. (In the book on page 232, the absurd sentence is considered as "infinite" or indeterminate; here however, after the page, it is considered as an "identical" sentence.)

What the logician treats with contempt is undoubtedly illogical or merely "*formally*" logical; but it is also, considered *logically*, only a phrase; it is logic dying in a phrase.

The unique should only be the last, dying expression (attribute) of you and me, the expression that turns into a view: an expression that is no longer such, that falls silent, that is mute.

You — unique! What thought content is here, what sentence content? None! Whoever wants to deduce a precise thought-content of the Unique as if it were a concept, whoever thinks that with "unique" one has said about you *what* you are, would show that they believe in phrases, because they don't recognize phrases as phrases, and would also show that they seek *specific* content in phrases.

You, inconceivable and inexpressible, are the phrase content, the phrase owner, the phrase embodied; you are the who, the one of the phrase. In the unique, science can dissolve into life, in which your *this* becomes *who* and this who no longer seeks itself in the word, in the Logos, in the attribute.

Szeliga takes the pain to show that the unique "measured by its own principle of seeing spooks everywhere becomes the spook of all spooks." He senses that the unique is an empty phrase, but he overlooks the fact that he himself, Szeliga, is the content of the phrase.

The unique in Heaven, which Feuerbach places beside the unique on earth, is the phrase without a phrase-owner. The unique *considered here* is God. This is the thing that guaranteed that religion would last, that it had the unique at least *in thought* and as a phrase, that it saw it *in Heaven*. But the heavenly unique is only a unique in which no one has an interest, whereas Feuerbach instead, whether he likes it or not, is interested in Stirner's unique, because he would have to treat it oddly, if he wanted to chase *his own unique* from his head. If the heavenly unique were one that existed in its own head rather than in Feuerbach's, it would be difficult to chase this unique from its head.

Hess says of the unique: "he's boasting." Undoubtedly, the unique, this obvious phrase, is an empty boast; it is Feuerbach's phrase without the phrase-owner. But isn't it a pathetic boast to call a long and broad thing a boast only because one can't find anything in it but the boast? Is Hess, this *unique* Hess, therefore nothing but a boast? Most certainly not!

The critics display even more irritation against the "egoist" than against the unique. Instead of delving into egoism as Stirner meant it, they stop at their usual childish depiction of it and roll out to everyone the well-known catalogue of sins. Look at egoism, the horrible sin that this Stirner wants to "recommend" to us.

Against the Christian definition: "God is love," critics in old Jerusalem could rise up and cry: "So now you see that the Christians are announcing a pagan God; because if God is love, then he

is the pagan god Amor, the god of love!" What need do the Jewish critics have to deal with love and the God who is love, when they have spit on the love-god, on Amor for so long?

Szeliga characterizes the egoist like this: "The egoist hopes for a carefree, happy life. He marries a rich girl — and now he has a jealous, chatterbox wife — in other words his hope was realized and it was an illusion."

Feuerbach says: "There is a well-founded difference between what is called egoistic, self-interested love, and what is called unselfish love. What? In a few words this: in self-interested love, the object is your courtesan; in unselfish love, she is your beloved. I find satisfaction in both, but in the first I subordinate the essence to a part; in the second I instead subordinate the part, the means, the organ to the whole, to the essence. Thus, I satisfy myself, my full, entire essence. In short, in selfish love, I sacrifice the higher thing to the lower thing, a higher pleasure to a lower pleasure, but in unselfish love, I sacrifice the lower thing to the higher thing."

Hess asks: "First of all, what is egoism in general, and what is the difference between the egoistic life and the life of love?" This question already reveals his kinship with the other two. How can one assert such a contrast between egoistic life and the life of love against Stirner, since for him the two get along quite well? Hess continues: "Egoistic life is the life of the animal world, which tears itself down and devours itself. The animal world is precisely the natural history of life that tears itself down and destroys itself, and all our history up to now is nothing but the history of the *social* animal world. But what distinguishes the *social* animal world from the animal world of the *forest*? Nothing but its *consciousness*. The history of the social animal world is precisely the history of the consciousness of the animal world, and as the *predator* is the final point of the natural animal world, so the *conscious predator* is the highest point of the social animal world. As egoism is mutual *alienation* of the species, so the consciousness of this alienation (egoistic consciousness) is *religious* consciousness. The animal world of the forest has no religion, simply because it lacks *consciousness* of its egoism, of its *alienation*, i.e., *consciousness of sin*. The earliest consciousness of humanity is consciousness of sin. — When egoistic theory, egoistic consciousness, religion and philosophy had reached their peak, egoistic practice also had to reach its peak. It has reached it in the modern, Christian, *shopkeeper's world*. This is the ultimate point of the social animal world. — The free competition of our modern shopkeeper's world is not only the perfect form of modern *murder with robbery*, but is at the same time the *consciousness* of the mutual, human alienation. Today's shopkeeper's world is the mediated form of conscious and basic egoism, corresponding to its essence."

These are quite popular characterizations of egoism, and one is only surprised that Stirner didn't make such simple reflections and let himself abandon the hateful monster, considering how stupid, vulgar and predatorily murderous egoism is. If he had thought, like Szeliga, that the egoist is nothing but a numbskull who marries a rich girl and ends up with a bickering wife, if he would have seen, like Feuerbach, that the egoist can't have a "sweetheart," or if he would have recognized, like Hess, the human-beast in egoism or would have sniffed out the predatory murderer there, how could he not have conceived a "profound horror" and a "legitimate indignation" towards it! Murder with robbery alone is already such infamy that it really is enough for Hess to cry out this single phrase against Stirner's egoist in order to raise all honest people against him and have them on Hess's side: the phrase is well chosen — and moving for a moral heart, like the cry of "heretic" for a mass of true believers.

Stirner dares to say that Feuerbach, Hess and Szeliga are egoists. Indeed, he is content here with saying nothing more than if he had said Feuerbach does absolutely nothing but the Feuer-

bachian, Hess does nothing but the Hessian, and Szeliga does nothing but the Szeligan; but he has given them an infamous label.

Does Feuerbach live in a world other than *his own*? Does he perhaps live in Hess's world, in Szeliga's world, in Stirner's world? Since Feuerbach lives in this world, since it surrounds him, isn't it the world that is felt, seen, thought by him, i.e., in a Feuerbachian way? He doesn't just live in the middle of it, but is himself its middle; he is the center of *his* world. And like Feuerbach, no one lives in any other world than his own, and like Feuerbach, everyone is the center of his own world. World is only what he himself is not, but what belongs to him, is in a relationship with him, exists for him.

Everything turns around you; you are the center of the outer world and of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your capacity, and what you grasp is your own simply because you grasp it. You, the unique, are "the unique" *only together with "your property."*

Meanwhile, it doesn't escape you that what is yours is still itself *its* own at the same time, i.e., it has its own existence; it is the unique the same as you. At this point you forget yourself in sweet self-forgetfulness.

But when you forget yourself, do you then disappear? When you don't think of yourself, have you utterly ceased to exist? When you look in your friend's eyes or reflect upon the joy you would like to bring him, when you gaze up at the stars, meditate upon their laws or perhaps send them a greeting, which they bring to a lonely little room, when you lose yourself in the activity of the infusion of tiny animals under a microscope, when you rush to help someone in danger of burning or drowning without considering the danger you yourself are risking, then indeed you don't "think" of yourself, you "forget yourself." But do you *exist* only when you *think* of yourself, and do you dissipate when you forget yourself? Do you exist only through self-consciousness? Who doesn't forget himself constantly, who doesn't lose sight of himself thousands of times in an hour?

This self-forgetfulness, *this* losing of oneself, is for us only a mode of self-enjoyment, it is only the pleasure we take in our world, in our property, i.e. world-pleasure.

It is not in this self-forgetfulness, but in forgetting that the world is *our* world, that unselfishness, i.e., duped egoism, has its basis. You throw yourself down before a "higher," absolute world and waste yourself. Unselfishness is not self-forgetfulness in the sense of no longer thinking of oneself and no longer being concerned with oneself, but in the other sense of forgetting that the world is "ours," of forgetting that one is the center or *owner* of this world, that it is our property. Fear and timidity toward the world as a "higher" world is cowardly, "humble" egoism, egoism in its slavish form, which doesn't dare to grumble, which secretly creeps about and "denies itself"; it is self-denial.

Our world and the sacred world — herein lies the difference between straightforward egoism and the self-denying egoism that cannot be confessed and crawls about incognito.

What happens with Feuerbach's example of the courtesan and the beloved? In the first case, one has a commercial relationship without personal interest (and doesn't it happen in countless other, completely different cases of commercial relationships that one can only be satisfied if one has an interest in the *person* with whom one deals, if one has a personal interest?), in the second case one has a personal interest. But what is the meaning of the second relationship? Most likely mutual interest with the person. If this interest between the people disappears from the relationship, it would become *meaningless*, because this interest is its only meaning. So what is marriage, which is praised as a "sacred relationship," if not the fixation of an interesting relationship de-

spite the danger that it could become dull and meaningless? People say that one shouldn't get divorced "frivolously." But why not? Because frivolity is a "sin" if it concerns a "sacred thing." There must be no frivolity! So then there is an egoist, who is cheated out of his frivolity and condemns himself to go on living in an uninteresting but sacred relationship. From the egoistic union, a "sacred bond" has developed; the mutual interest the people had for each other ceases, but the bond without interest remains.

Another example of the uninteresting is work, which passes for one's lifework, for the human calling. This is the origin of the prejudice that one has to *earn* his bread, and that it is shameful to have bread without having worked a bit to get it: this is the *pride of the wage*. Work has no merit *in itself* and does no honor to anyone, just as the life of the idler brings him no disgrace. Either you take an interest in work activity, and this interest doesn't let you rest, you have to be active: and then work is your desire, your special pleasure without placing it above the laziness of the idler which is his pleasure. Or you use work to pursue another interest, a result or a "wage," and you submit to work only as a *means* to this end; and then work is not interesting in itself and has no pretension of being so, and you can recognize that it is not anything valuable or sacred in itself, but simply something that is now *unavoidable* for gaining the desired result, the *wage*. But the work that is considered as an "honor for the human being" and as his "calling" has become the creator of economics and remains the mistress of *sacred* socialism, where, in its quality as "human labor," it is supposed to "develop human capacities," and where this development is a human calling, an absolute interest. (We will have more to say about this further on).

The belief that something other than self-interest might justify applying oneself to a given thing, the belief that leaves self-interest behind, generates a lack of interest, "sin" understood as a tendencies towards one's own interest.

Only in the face of *sacred interest* does *one's own* interest become "private interest," abominable "egoism," "sin" — Stirner points out the difference between sacred interest and one's own interest briefly on page 224: "I can *sin* against the former, the latter I can only *throw away*."

Sacred interest is the uninteresting, because it is an *absolute* interest, or an interest for its own sake, and it's all the same whether you take an interest in it or not. You *are supposed* to make it your interest; it is not originally *yours*, it doesn't spring from you, but is an eternal, universal, purely human interest. It is uninteresting, because there is no consideration in it for you or your interest; it is an interest without interested parties, because it is a universal or human interest. And because you are not its owner, but are supposed to become its follower and servant, egoism comes to an end before it, and "lack of interest" begins.

If you take just *one* sacred interest to heart, you'll be caught and duped about *your own* interests. Call the interest that you follow now sacred, and tomorrow you will be its slave.

All behavior toward anything considered absolutely interesting, or valuable in and for itself, is religious behavior or, more simply, religion. The interesting can only be interesting through *your* interest, the valuable can only have value insofar as you give it value, whereas, on the other hand, what is interesting despite you is an uninteresting thing, what is valuable despite you is a valueless thing.

The interest of those spirits, like that of society, of the human being, of the human essence, of the people as a whole, their "essential interest," is an *alien* interest and *should* be your interest. The interest of the beloved *is* your interest and is of interest to you only so long as it remains *your* interest. Only when it stops being an interest of yours can it become a sacred interest, which

should be yours although it is not *yours*. The relationship that was interesting up to that point now becomes a disinterested and uninteresting relationship.

In commercial and personal relationships, *your interest* comes first, and all sacrifices happen only to benefit this interest of yours, while on the contrary, in the religious relationship, the religious interest of the absolute or of the spirit, i.e., the interest *alien* to you, comes first, and *your* interests should be sacrificed to this alien interest.

Therefore, duped egoism consists in the belief in an *absolute interest*, which does not spring from the egoist, i.e., is not interesting to him, but rather arises imperiously and firmly against him, an "eternal" interest. Here the egoist is "duped," because his own interest, "private interest," is not only left unconsidered, but is even condemned, and yet "egoism" remains, because he welcomes this alien or absolute interest only in the hope that it will grant him some pleasure.

This absolute interest, which is supposed to be interesting without interested persons, and which is also therefore not the unique's thing, but for which instead human beings are supposed to view themselves as "vessels of honor" and as "weapons and tools," Stirner calls simply "the sacred." Indeed, the sacred is absolutely uninteresting, because it has the pretension of being interesting even though no one is interested in it; it is also the "universal," i.e., the thing of interest that lacks a subject, because it is not one's own interest, the interest of a unique. In other words, this "universal interest" is more than you — a "higher" thing; it is also without you — an "absolute"; it is an interest for itself — alien to you; it demands that you serve it and finds you willing, if you let yourself be beguiled.

To stay with Feuerbach's touching definition of the courtesan, there are those who would gladly be lewd, because physical desire never gives them rest. But they are told, do you know what lewdness is? It is a sin, a vulgarity; it defiles us. If they were to say we don't want lewd interests to cause us to neglect other interests that are even more important to us than the enjoyment of the senses, this would not be a religious consideration, and they would make their sacrifice not to chastity, but to other benefits of which they cannot deprive themselves. But if instead they deny their natural impulse for the sake of chastity, this occurs due to religious considerations. What interest do they have in chastity? Unquestionably, no natural interest, because their nature advises them to be lewd: their actual, unmistakable and undeniable interest is lewdness. But chastity is a *scruple* of their spirit, because it is an interest of the spirit, a spiritual interest: it is an absolute interest before which natural and "private" interests must remain silent, and which makes the spirit *scrupulous*. Now some throw off this scruple with a "jerk" and the cry: "How stupid!" because, however *scrupulous* or religious they may be, here an instinct tells them that the spirit is a grouchy despot opposed to natural desire — whereas others overcome this scruple by thinking more deeply and even reassure themselves theoretically: the former overcome the scruples; the latter — thanks to their *virtuosity* of thinking (which makes thinking a need and a thing of interest for them) — dissolve the scruple. Thus, lewdness and the courtesan only look so bad because they offend the "eternal interest" of chastity.[1]

The spirit alone has raised difficulties and created scruples; and from this it seems to follow that they could only be eliminated by means of the spirit or thought. How bad it would be for those poor souls who have let themselves be talked into accepting these scruples without possess-

[1] Throughout this passage and the following several paragraphs, Stirner is playing on the words "Bedenken" (scruples) and "Denken" (thinking or thought), a bit of wordplay lost in translation. It also helps to know that "Bedenken" can also translate as "reflection" or "doubt," and in some places, Stirner seems to play on all these meanings as well. — translator

ing the strength of thought necessary to become the masters of the same! How horrible if, in this instance they would have to wait until pure critique gave them their freedom! But sometimes these people help themselves with a healthy, homemade *levity*, which is just as good *for their needs* as *free thought* is for pure critique, since the critic, as a "virtuoso" of thought, possesses an undeniable impulse to overcome scruples through thought.

Scruples are as much an everyday occurrence as talking and chatting; so what could one say against them? Nothing; only everyday scruples are not sacred scruples. Everyday scruples come and go, but sacred scruples last and are *absolute*; they are scruples in the absolute sense (dogmas, articles of faith, basic principles). Against them, the egoist, the desecrator, rebels and tests his egoistic force against their sacred force. All "free thought" is a desecration of scruples and an egoistic effort against their sacred force. If, after a few attacks, much free thought has come to a stop, after a few attacks, before a new sacred scruple, which would disgrace egoism, nonetheless free thought in its freest form (pure critique) will not stop before any absolute scruple, and with egoistic perseverance desecrates one scrupulous sanctity after another. But since this freest thought is only egoistic *thought*, only mental freedom, it becomes a sacred power of thought and announces the Gospel that only in thought can one find redemption. Now even thought itself appears only as a sacred thing, as a human calling, as a sacred scruple: hereafter, only a scruple (a realization) dissolves scruples.

If scruples could only be dissolved through thought, people would never be "mature" enough to dissolve them.

Scrupulousness, even if it has achieved the pure scruple or purity of critique, is still only *religiosity*; the religious is the scrupulous. But it remains scrupulousness, when one thinks one is only able to put an end to scruples through scruples, when one despises a "convenient" *lack of scruples* as the "egoistic aversion to work of the mass."

In scrupulous egoism, all that is missing for putting the emphasis on egoism rather than scrupulousness and seeing egoism as the victor is the recognition of the lack of scruples. So it doesn't matter whether it wins through thought or through a lack of scruples.

Is thought perhaps "rejected" through this? No, only its sanctity is denied, it is rejected as a *purpose* and a calling. As a *means* it is left to everyone who gains might through this *means*. The aim of thought is rather the *loss of scruples*, because the thinker in every instance starts out, with his thought on this, to finally find the right point or to get beyond thought and put an end to this matter. But if one sanctifies the "labor of thought," or, what is the same, calls it "human," one no less gives a calling to human beings than if one prescribed faith to them, and this leads them away from the lack of scruples, rather than leading them to it as the real or egoistic meaning of thought. One misleads people into scrupulousness and deliberation, as one promises them "well-being" in thought; weak thinkers who let themselves be misled can do nothing more than comfort themselves with some thought due to their weak thinking, i.e., they can only become believers. Instead of making light of scruples, they become scrupulous, because they imagine that their well-being lies in thought. (Footnote: The religious turmoil of our times has its reason in this: it is a immediate expression of this scrupulousness).

But scruples, which thought created, now exist and can certainly be eliminated through thought. But this thought, this critique, achieves this aim only when it is egoistic thought, egoistic critique, i.e., when egoism or self-interest is asserted against scruples or against the uninteresting, when self-interest is openly professed, and the egoist criticizes from the *egoistic viewpoint*, rather than from the christian, socialist, humanist, human, free thought, spiritual, etc., viewpoint (i.e.,

like a christian, a socialist, etc.), because the self-interest of the unique, thus your self-interest, gets trampled underfoot precisely in the sacred, or human, world, and this same world, which Hess and Szeliga for example, reproach as being egoist, on the contrary has bound the egoist to the whipping post for thousands of years and fanatically sacrificed egoism to every "sacred" thing that has rained down from the realm of thought and faith. We don't live in an egoistic world, but in a world that is completely sacred down to its lowest scrap of property.

It might seem that it must, indeed, be left to every individual to rid himself of scruples as he knows how, but that it is still the *task of history* to dissolve scruples through critical reflection. But this is just what Stirner denies. Against this "task of history," he maintains that the history of scruples and the reflections that relate to them is coming to an end. Not the task of dissolving, but the capriciousness that makes short work of scruples, not the force of thought, but the force of a lack of scruples seems to come into play. Thinking can serve only to reinforce and ensure the lack of scruples. "Free thought" had its starting point in *unscrupulous* egoistic revolt against sacred scruples; it started from the *lack of scruples*. Anyone who thinks freely makes no scruples over the most sacred of scruples: the lack of scruples is the spirit and the egoistic worth of free thought. The worth of this thought lies not in the thinker, but in the egoist, who egoistically places *his own* power, the force of thought, above sacred scruples, and this doesn't weaken you and me at all.

To describe this lack of scruples, Stirner uses (p. 197) expressions like "jerk, leap, jubilant whoop," and says "the vast significance of unthinking jubilation could not be recognized in the long night of thinking and believing." He meant nothing less by this than, first of all, the hidden, *egoistic basis* of each and every critique of a sacred thing, even the blindest and most obsessed, but in the second place, the *easy form* of *egoistic* critique, which he tried to carry out by means of *his force of thought* (a naked virtuosity). He strove to show how a person without scruples could use thought as a critique of scruples from his own viewpoint, as the unique. Stirner didn't leave the "deliverance of the world" in the hands of thinkers and the scrupulous anymore.

Jubilation and rejoicing becomes a bit ridiculous when one contrasts them with the mass and volume of deep scruples that still cannot be overcome with so little effort. Of course, the mass of scruples accumulated in history and continually reawakened by thinkers cannot be eliminated with mere rejoicing. Thinkers cannot get past it if their thinking does not receive full satisfaction at the same time, since the satisfaction of their thinking is their *actual interest*. Thought must not be suppressed by jubilation, in the way that, from the point of view of faith, it is supposed to be suppressed by faith. Anyway, as an actual interest and, therefore, your interest, you can't let it be suppressed. Since you have the need to think, you cannot limit yourself to driving scruples out through jubilation; you also need to think them away. But it is from this need that Stirner's *egoistic thought* has arisen, and he made a first effort, even if still very clumsy, to relate the interests of thought to unscrupulous egoism, and his book was supposed to show that uncouth jubilation still has the potential, if necessary, to become critical jubilation, an egoistic critique.

Self-interest forms the basis of egoism. But isn't self-interest in the same way a mere name, a concept empty of content, utterly lacking any conceptual development, like the unique? The opponents look at self-interest and egoism as a "principle." This would require them to understand self-interest as an *absolute*. Thought can be a principle, but then it must develop as absolute thought, as eternal reason; the I, should it be a principle, must, as the absolute I, form the basis of a system built upon it. So one could even make an absolute of self-interest and derive from it

as "human interest" a philosophy of self-interest; yes, morality is actually the system of *human interest*.

Reason is one and the same: what is reasonable remains reasonable despite all folly and errors; "private reason" has no right against universal and eternal reason. You should and must submit to reason. Thought is one and the same: what is actually thought is a logical truth and despite the opposing manias of millions of human beings is still the unchanging truth; "private" thought, *one's view*, must remain silent before eternal thought. *You* should and must submit to truth. Every human being is reasonable, every human being is human only due to thought (the philosopher says: thought distinguishes the human being from the beast). Thus, *self-interest* is also a *universal* thing, and every human being is a "self-interested human being." Eternal interest as "human interest" kicks out against "private interest," develops as the "principle" of morality and sacred socialism, among other things, and subjugates *your* interest to the law of eternal interest. It appears in multiple forms, for example, as state interest, church interest, human interest, the interest "of all," in short, as *true interest*.

Now, does Stirner have his "principle in this interest, in *the* interest? Or, contrarily, doesn't he arouse *your unique* interest against the "eternally interesting" against — the uninteresting? And is *your* self-interest a "principle," a logical — thought? Like the unique, it is a phrase — *in the realm of thought*; but in you it is unique like you yourself.

It is necessary to say a further word about the human being. As it seems, Stirner's book is written against *the human being*. He has drawn the harshest judgments for this, as for the word "egoist," and has aroused the most stubborn prejudices. Yes, the book actually is written against *the human being*, and yet Stirner could have gone after the same target without offending people so severely if he had reversed the subject and said that he wrote against *the inhuman monster*. But then he would have been at fault if someone misunderstood him in the opposite, i.e., the emotional way, and placed him on the list of those who raise their voice for the "true human being." But Stirner says: the human being is the inhuman monster; what the one is, the other is; what is said against the one, is said against the other.

If a concept lacks an essence, nothing will ever be found that completely fits that concept. If you are lacking in the concept of human being, it will immediately expose that you are something individual, something that cannot be expressed by the term human being, thus, in every instance, an *individual human being*. If someone now expects you to be completely human and nothing but human, nonetheless you wouldn't be able to strip yourself of your individuality, and precisely because of this individuality, you would be an inhuman monster, i.e. a human being who is not truly human, or a human being who is *actually* an inhuman monster. The concept of human being would have its reality only in the inhuman monster.

The fact that every actual human being, measured by the concept of human being, is an inhuman monster, was expressed by religion with the claim that all human beings "are sinners" (the consciousness of sin); today the sinner is called an egoist. And what has one decided in consequence of this judgment? To redeem the sinner, to overcome egoism, to find and realize the true human being. One rejected the individual, i.e., the *unique*, in favor of the concept; one rejected the inhuman monster in favor of the human being, and didn't recognize that the inhuman monster is the true and only possible reality of the human being. One absolutely wanted a truly human reality of human beings.

But one aspired to an absurdity. The human being is real and actual in the inhuman monster; every inhuman monster is — a human being. But you are an inhuman monster only as the reality of the human being, an inhuman monster only in comparison to the *concept of human being*.

You are an inhuman monster, and this is why you are completely human, a real and actual human being, a complete human being. But you are even *more* than a complete human being, you are an individual, a *unique* human being. Human being and inhuman monster, these contrasts from the religious world lose their divine and diabolical, and thus their sacred and absolute, meaning, in you, the *unique*.

The human being, which our saints agonize so much to recognize, insofar as they always preach that one should recognize the *human being* in the human being, gets recognized completely and actually only when it is recognized as the inhuman monster. If it is recognized as such, all religious or "human" *impositions* cease, and the domination of the *good*, the hierarchy, comes to an end, because the unique, the altogether *common human being* (not Feuerbach's virtuous "common man"[2]), is at the same time the complete human being.

While Stirner writes against the human being, at the same time and in the same breath, he writes against the inhuman monster, as opposed to the human being; but he doesn't write against the human being who is an inhuman monster or the inhuman monster who is a human being — i.e., he writes for the utterly common unique, who is a complete human being for himself anyhow, because he is an inhuman monster.

Only pious people, sacred socialists, etc., only "saints" of every kind prevent the human being from being recognized and appreciated in the human being. They alone paralyze pure human intercourse, as they have always limited common egoistic intercourse and strive to limit it. They have introduced a *sacred* intercourse, and where possible they would like to make it the *Holy of Holies*.

Actually, Szeliga also says various things about what the egoist and egoism are, but he has exhausted the topic with his example of the rich girl and the nagging wife. He depicts the egoist as having a horror of work, as a man who "hopes that roasted pigeons will fly into his mouth," who "*preserves* nothing worthy of the name of hope," etc. By this he means a man who wants to live comfortably. If instead he'd defined the egoist as a sleepyhead, it would have been even clearer and simpler.

Just as Szeliga betrays that his egoist can only be measured by an absolute, insofar as he measures him by "real hopes," Feuerbach, who is generally more the master of the appropriate word, repeats the same thing in an even more determined way, saying of the selfish person (the egoist) that "he sacrifices what is higher to what is lower"; and of the unselfish person that he "sacrifices the lower thing to the higher thing." What is "higher and lower"? Isn't it something which is directed toward you and of which you are the measure? If something was worthwhile for you, and precisely for you in this moment — because you are you only *in the moment*, only *in the moment* are you actual; as a "universal you," you would instead be "another" in each moment — if it counted for you at this moment as somewhat "higher" than something else, you would not sacrifice it to the latter. Rather, in each moment, you sacrifice only what in that precise moment seems "lower" or less important to you. Thus, if Feuerbach's "higher thing" is supposed to have

[2] This is the single instance where I have chosen to translate "Mensch" as man, in order to emphasize the distinction Stirner is making. He is emphasizing that what is actually "common" to every human being is that he or she is *unique*, as opposed to Feuerbach's idealized concept of the "common man." — translator.

a meaning, it has to be a higher thing separate and free from you, from the moment; it has to be an absolute higher thing. An *absolute* higher thing is such that you are not asked if it is the higher thing for you; rather it is the higher thing *despite you*. Only in this way can one speak of a higher thing and a "more elevated enjoyment" that "is sacrificed." In Feuerbach, such a "higher thing" is the enjoyment of the beloved in contrast to the enjoyment of the courtesan, or the lover in contrast to the courtesan; the first is higher, the second lower. If for you perhaps the courtesan is the higher pleasure, because for you in the moment, she is the only pleasure you desire, what does this matter to great noble hearts like Feuerbach, who take pleasure only in the "beloved" and decree, with the measure of their pure hearts, the beloved must be the higher thing! Only the one who is attached to a beloved, and not a courtesan, "satisfies his full, complete essence." And in what does this full, complete essence consist? Certainly not in your essence of the moment, in what you are right now in essence, nor even in the essence that *you* are generally, but rather in the "human essence." For the human essence the beloved is the highest. — So who is the egoist in Feuerbach's sense? The one who *sins* against "the higher thing" against the absolute higher thing (i.e., higher in spite of your opposing interest), against the uninteresting; thus, the egoist is — the *sinner*. The same would be true of Szeliga's egoist, if he had more power over his expressions.

Hess is the one who says most unequivocally that the egoist is the sinner. Of course, in saying this, Hess also confesses in a complete and undisguised way that he has not, even distantly, understood what Stirner's book is getting at. Doesn't Stirner deny that the egoist is the sinner and that conscious egoism (conscious is the sense that Hess intends it) is the consciousness of sin? If a European kills a crocodile, he acts as an egoist against crocodiles, but he has no scruples about doing this, and he is not accused of "sin" for it. If instead an ancient Egyptian, who considered the crocodile to be *sacred*, had nonetheless killed one in self-defense, he would have, indeed, defended his skin as an egoist, but at the same time, he would have committed a sin; his egoism would have been sin, — he, the egoist, a sinner. — From this, it should be obvious that the egoist is necessarily a *sinner* before what is "sacred," before what is "higher"; if he asserts his egoism against the sacred, this is, as such, a sin. On the other hand, though, that is only a sin insofar as it is measured by the criterion of the "sacred," and the only egoist who drags the "consciousness of sin" along with him is the one who is possessed at the same time by the consciousness of the sacred. A European who kills a crocodile is aware of his egoism in doing this, i.e., he acts as a conscious egoist; but he doesn't imagine that his egoism is a sin and he laughs at the Egyptian's consciousness of sin.

Against the "sacred," the egoist is always a sinner; toward the "sacred," he can't become anything other than — a *criminal*. The *sacred* crocodile marks the human *egoist* as the human *sinner*. The egoist can cast off the sinner and the sin from himself only if he desecrates the sacred, just as the European beats the crocodile to death without sin because His Holiness, the Crocodile, is for him a crocodile without holiness.

Hess says: "Today's mercantile world is the conscious and basic mediated form of egoism, corresponding to its essence." This present world, which is full of philanthropy, completely agrees with socialism *in principle* (see, for example, in the *Gesellschaftsspiegel* [Society Mirror] or the *Westphälischen Dampfboot* [Westphalian Steamboat][3], how socialist principles are completely the same as the "Sunday thoughts" and ideals of all good citizens or bourgeois) — this world in which the great majority can be brought to give up their advantages in the name of sacred things

[3] Two socialist/left democratic publications of the time. Moses Hess published the first oF these.

and where the ideals of brotherhood, philanthropy, right, justice, the ideals of being and doing for others, etc., don't just pass from one person to another, but are a horrible and ruinous seriousness — this world that yearns for true humanity and hopes to finally find true redemption through socialists, communists, philanthropists of every sort — this world in which socialist endeavors are nothing but the obvious sense of the "shopkeeper's soul" and are well-received by all right-thinking people — this world whose principle is the "welfare of all people" and the "welfare of humanity," and that only dreams of this welfare because it doesn't yet know how it is supposed to produce this welfare and does not yet trust in the socialist actualization of its pet idea — this world that lashes out violently against all egoism, Hess vilifies as an "egoistic" world. And yet, he is right. Because the world is agitating against the devil, the devil sits on its neck. Only Hess should have reckoned *sacred* socialism along with this egoistic, sin-conscious world.

Hess calls free competition the complete form of murder with robbery and also the complete consciousness of the mutual human alienation (i.e., egoism). Here again, egoism should still be guilty. Why then did one decide on competition? Because it seemed *useful* to each and all. And why do socialists now want to abolish it? Because it doesn't provide the hoped-for *usefulness*, because the majority do badly from it, because everyone wants to improve his position and because the abolition of competition seems advisable for *this purpose*.

Is egoism the "basic principle" of competition, or, on the contrary, haven't egoists just *miscalculated* about this? Don't they have to give it up precisely because it doesn't satisfy their egoism?

People introduced competition because they saw it as *well-being for all*; they *agreed* upon it and experimented *collectively* with it. This thing, this isolation and separation, is itself a product of association, agreement, shared convictions, and it didn't just isolate people, but also connected them. It was a *legal* status, but this law was a common tie, a social federation. In competition, people come to *agreement* perhaps in the way that hunters on a hunt may find it good for the hunt and for each of their respective purposes to scatter throughout the forest and hunt "in isolation." But what is most *useful* is open to argument. And now, sure enough, it turns out — and, by the way, socialists weren't the first ones to discover it — that in competition, not everyone finds *his profit*, his desired "private advantage," his value, his actual interest. But this comes out only through egoistic or selfish calculations.

But meanwhile, some have prepared their own depiction of egoism and think of it as simply "isolation." But what in the world does egoism have to do with isolation? Do I become an egoist like this, by fleeing from people? I may isolate myself or get lonely, but I'm not, for this reason, a hair more egoistic than others who remain among people and enjoy contact with them. If I isolate myself, this is because I no longer find pleasure in society, but if instead I remain among people, it is because they still offer me a lot. Remaining is no less egoistic than isolating oneself.

Of course, in competition everyone stands alone; but if competition disappeared because people see that cooperation is *more useful* than isolation, wouldn't everyone still be an egoist in association and seek *his own* advantage? Someone will object that one seeks it at the expense of others. But one won't seek it at the expense of others, because others no longer want to be such fools as to let anyone live at their expense.

But "the egoist is someone who thinks only of himself!" — This would be someone who doesn't know and relish all the joys that come from participation with others, i.e., from thinking of others as well, someone who lacks countless pleasures — thus a *poor sort*. But why should this desolate loner be an egoist in comparison to richer sorts? Certainly, for a long time, we were able to get used to considering poverty a disgrace, as a crime, and the sacred socialists have clearly proven

that the poor are treated like criminals. But sacred socialists treat those who are in *their* eyes contemptibly poor in this way, just as much as the bourgeoisie do it to *their* poor.

But why should the person who is poorer with respect to a certain interest be called more egoistic than the one who possesses that interest? Is the oyster more egoistic than the dog; is the Moor more egoistic than the German; is the poor, scorned, Jewish junkman more egoistic than the enthusiastic socialist; is the vandal who destroys artworks for which he *feels* nothing more egoistic than the art connoisseur who treats the same works with great love and care because he has a feeling and interest for them? And now if someone — we leave it open whether such a one can be shown to exist — doesn't find any "human" interest in human beings, if he doesn't know how to appreciate them as human beings, wouldn't he be a poorer egoist with regard to this interest rather than being, as the enemies of egoism claim, a model of egoism? One who loves a human being is richer, thanks to this love, than another who doesn't love anyone. But there is no distinction between egoism and non-egoism in this at all, because both are only pursuing their own interest.

But everyone should have an interest in human beings, love for human beings!

But see how far you get with this "should," with this *law of love*. For two millennia this commandment has been led people by the heart, and still today, socialists complain that our proletarians get treated with less love than the slaves of the ancients, and yet these same socialists still raise their voices quite loudly in favor of this — law of love.

If you want people to take an interest in you, draw it out of them and don't remain uninteresting sacred beings holding out your sacred humanity like a sacred robe and crying like beggars: "Respect our humanity, that is sacred!"

Egoism, as Stirner uses it, is not opposed to love nor to thought; it is no enemy of the sweet life of love, nor of devotion and sacrifice; it is no enemy of intimate warmth, but it is also no enemy of critique, nor of socialism, nor, in short, of any *actual interest*. It doesn't exclude any interest. It is directed against only disinterestedness and the uninteresting; not against love, but against sacred love, not against thought, but against sacred thought, not against socialists, but against sacred socialists, etc.

The "exclusiveness" of the egoist, which some want to pass off as isolation, separation, loneliness, is on the contrary full *participation* in the interesting by — exclusion of the uninteresting.

No one gives Stirner credit for his global intercourse and his union of egoists from the largest section of his book, "My Intercourse."

* * *

With regard to the three opponents specifically mentioned it would be a tedious task to go through all the twisted passages of their writings. In the same way, I have little intention at this time of more closely examining the principles that they represent or would like to represent, specifically Feuerbach's philosophy, pure critique and socialism. Each of these deserves a treatise of its own, for which another occasion may well be found. Therefore, we add only a few considerations.

Szeliga

Szeliga starts this way: "Pure critique has shown, etc.," as if Stirner hadn't spoken about this subject (e.g., on page 469 of *The Unique*). In the first two pages, Szeliga presents himself as the "critic whom critique leads to sit down as one with the object being observed, to recognize it as mind born of mind, enter into the innermost depths of the essence he is to fight, etc." Szeliga hasn't in the least entered into the innermost depths of Stirner's book, as we've shown, and so we would like to consider him here not as the pure critic, but simply as one of the mass who wrote a review of the book. We'll look to see if Szeliga does what he would have critique do, without noting whether critique would do the same thing, and so instead of saying, for example, this "critique will follow the life course of the unique," we will say: "Szeliga will follow, etc."

When Szeliga expresses one of his thoughts in a completely conceptual way with the word "ape," one could say that pure critique expresses a similar thought with a different word; but words aren't indifferent for either Szeliga or critique, and one would be doing wrong to critique if one tried to impose Szeliga's "ape" upon its thought which might be differently nuanced: the ape is the true expression of thought only for Szeliga.

From page 24 to page 32, Szeliga expressly takes the cause of pure critique. But wouldn't pure critique perhaps find this poetic manner of taking its cause quite awkward?

We don't welcome his invocation of the Critical Muse, which is supposed to have inspired or "gave rise to" him, and pass over everything that he says in praise of his muse, even "the new action of self-perfecting for which the unique (i.e., Stirner, whom Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess call the "unique") gives him the opportunity."

One can see how Szeliga is able to keep up with the life course of the unique if one compares, for example, the first paragraph on page 6 of his writing with pages 468–478 of *The Unique* [in "My Self-Enjoyment"]. Szeliga opposes the courage of thinking to Stirner's "thoughtlessness"[4] as if to a kind of cowardice. But why doesn't he "enter into the innermost depths of the essence he is to fight"; why doesn't he examine whether this thoughtlessness doesn't get along quite well with the courage of thinking? He should have precisely "sat down as one with the object being observed." But who could ever enjoy sitting down as one with an object as despicable as thoughtlessness. The mere need to name it makes one want to spit it out.

Stirner says of pure critique: "From the standpoint of thought, there is no force at all that can be higher than your own, and it is a pleasure to see how easily and playfully this dragon devours every other worm of thought[5]." Since Szeliga presents the thing as if Stirner was also acting as a critic, he thinks that "the unique (like an ape) entices the Dragon — critique — and spurs it to devour the worms of thought, starting with those of freedom and unselfishness." But what critique does Stirner apply? Most likely not pure critique, because this, according to Szeliga's own words, only fights against "particular" freedom against "true" freedom, in order to "educate ourselves to the idea of true, human freedom in general." What does Stirner's *egoistic*, and so not at all "pure," critique have to do with the "idea of unselfish, true, human freedom," with the freedom "which is not a fixed Idea, because (a very pointed reason) it is not fixed in the state or in society or in a creed or in any other particularity, but is recognized in every human being, in all self-

[4] Or "mindlessness," giving further evidence of Stirner's familiarity with eastern philosophy. However, in context, "thoughtlessness" works better here. — translator

[5] "Worm" here is being used in its archaic sense of a specific type of dragon… In the original Stirner uses "Drachen" and "Würm." I have used the corresponding terms in my translation. — translator

consciousness, and leaves to everyone the measure his freedom, but at the same time measures him according to its measure?" (The idea of freedom, which recognizes *itself* and measures every human being according to the mass, in which he is included. Just as God recognizes *himself* and measures human beings according to the mass, giving each their measure of freedom as he divides them into the unrepentant and the elect.)

On the other hand, the unique "should have loosed the dragon, critique, against another worm of thought, right and law." But again, this is not pure critique, but self-interested critique. If Stirner practiced pure critique, then he would have to, as Szeliga expresses it, "demand the renunciation of privilege, of right based on violence, the renunciation of egoism"; thus, he would have to lead "true, human" right in the struggle against that "based on violence," and admonish people that they should adhere to the true right. Stirner never uses pure critique, never goads this dragon to do anything, has no need of it and never achieves his results by means of the "progressive purity of critique." Otherwise, he would also have to imagine like Szeliga, for example, that "love must be a new creation which critique tries to lead to the heights." Stirner doesn't have such Szeligian magnificence, as "true freedom, the suppression of egoism, the new creation of love," in mind at all.

As we said, we'll pass over the passages in which Szeliga really campaigns against Stirner for the cause of critique, as one would have to attack nearly every sentence. "Work avoidance, laziness, idle essence, corruption" play a particularly lovely role in these passages; but then he also speaks of the "science of human beings" which the human being must create from the concept of "human being," and on page 32 he says: "The human being to discover is no longer a category, and therefore not something particular outside of the human being." If Szeliga had understood that since the unique is a completely empty term or category, it is therefore no longer a category, he might have acknowledged it as "the name of that which for him is still nameless." But I fear he doesn't know what he's saying when he says: "no longer a category."

Finally, "the new act of self-perfection, in which the unique gave opportunity to pure critique," consists in this, that "the world, which the unique completes, has in him and through him given its fullest denial," and that "critique can only bid farewell to it, to this old exhausted, shattered, corrupted world." Such a courteous *self*-perfection!

Feuerbach

Whether Stirner has read and understood Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* could only be demonstrated by a particular critique of that book, which shouldn't be set forth here. Therefore, we'll limit ourselves to a few points.

Feuerbach believes that he is speaking in Stirner's sense when he says: "This is precisely a sign of Feuerbach's religiosity, of his restriction, that he is still infatuated with an *object*, that he still wants *something*, still loves something — a sign that he has still not risen to the absolute idealism of egoism." But has Feuerbach even looked at the following passages from *The Unique*? "The meaning of the law of love may be this: every human being must have Something that stands *above him*." (p. 381). This Something of *sacred* love is the *spook*. "The one who is full of sacred (religious, moral, human) love, loves only the spook, etc." (p. 383). A bit later, on pages 383–395, for example: "It is not as my feeling that love becomes an obsession, but through the alienation of the object, through the *absolute love-worthy* object, etc." "My love is my own when it exists in

a particular and egoist interest; consequently, the object of my love is actually *my* object or my property." "I'll stick with the old love song and love *my* object," thence *my* "something."

Where Stirner says: "I have based my cause on nothing," Feuerbach makes it "*the* Nothing," and so concludes from this that the egoist is a pious atheist. However, the Nothing is a definition of God. Here Feuerbach plays with a word with which Szeliga (on page 33 of the "*Nordeutsche Blätter*") struggles in a Feuerbachian way. Furthermore, Feuerbach says on page 31 of *The Essence of Christianity*: "The only true atheist is the one for whom the attributes of the divine essence, like love, wisdom, justice are nothing, and not the one for whom only the subject of these attributes is nothing." Doesn't Stirner achieve this, especially if the Nothing is not loaded on him in place of nothing?

Feuerbach asks: "How does Feuerbach allow (divine) attributes to remain?" and answers: "Not in this way, as attributes of God, no, but as attributes of nature and humanity, as natural, human properties. When these attributes are transferred from God into the human being, they immediately lose their divine character." Stirner answers against it: Feuerbach allows the attributes to exist as *ideals* — as essential determinations of the species, which are "imperfect" in individual human beings and only become perfect "in the mass of the species," as the "essential perfection of perfect human beings," thus as ideals for individual human beings. He doesn't allow them to continue to exist as divine attributes, insofar as he doesn't attribute them to their subject, God, but as *human attributes*, insofar as he "transfers them from God to the *human being*." Now Stirner directs his attack precisely against the human, and Feuerbach ingenuously comes back with the "human being" and means that if only the attributes were made "human," or moved into the human being, they would immediately become completely "profane and common." But human attributes are not at all more common and profane than divine attributes, and Feuerbach is still a long way from being "a true atheist" in the way he defines it, nor does he want to be one.

"The basic illusion," Feuerbach says, "is God as subject." But Stirner has shown that the basic illusion is rather the idea of "essential perfection," and that Feuerbach, who supports this basic prejudice with all his might, is therefore, precisely, a true christian.

"Feuerbach shows," he continues, "that the divine is *not* divine, God is *not* God, but only the human essence loving itself, affirming itself and appreciating itself to the highest degree." But who is this "human essence"? Stirner has shown that this human essence is precisely the spook that is also called the human being, and that *you*, the unique essence, are led to speak as a Feuerbachian by the attaching of this human essence to "self-affirmation." The point of contention that Stirner raised is thus again completely evaded.

"The theme, the core of Feuerbach's writing," he continues, "is the abolition of the split into an essential and non-essential I — the deification of the human being, i.e., the positioning, the recognition of *the whole human being* from head to foot. Isn't the divinity of the *individual* specifically announced at the end as the shattered secret of religion?" "The only writing in which the slogan of modern times, the personality, individuality, has ceased to be a senseless phrase is precisely *The Essence of Christianity*." But what the "whole human being" is, what the "individual, personality, individuality" are, is shown in the following: "For Feuerbach, the individual is the absolute, that is, the *true, actual* essence. But why doesn't he say: this exclusive individual? Because, in that case, he wouldn't know what he wanted — from that standpoint, which he denies, he would sink back into the religious standpoint." — So "the whole human being" is not "this human being," not the common, criminal, self-seeking human being. Of course, Feuerbach would fall into the religious standpoint that he rejects if he described *this* exclusive individual as the "absolute

essence." But it wouldn't be because he was saying something about *this* individual, but rather because he describes him as something religious (the "absolute essence") or rather uses his religious attributes for this, and secondly because he "sets up an individual" as "sacred and untouchable by all other individuals." Thus, with the words cited above, nothing is said against Stirner, since Stirner does not talk about a "sacred and untouchable individual," nor of an "incomparable and exclusive individual that is God or can become God"; it doesn't occur to him to deny that the "individual" is "communist." In fact, Stirner has granted validity to the words "individual" and "particular person" because he lets them sink into the expression "unique." But in doing so, he does what he recognizes specifically in the part of his book entitled "My Power," saying on page 275: "In the end, I still have to take back half the style of expression that I wanted to make use of only so long as, etc."

When later, against Stirner's statement, "I am more than a human being," Feuerbach raises the question: "Are you also more than male?," one must indeed write off the entire masculine position. He continues like this: "Is your essence or rather — since the egoist scorns the *word* essence, even though he uses it — [Stirner inserts:] perhaps Stirner only cleanses it of the duplicity it has, for example, in Feuerbach, where it seems as if he is actually talking of you and me when he speaks of our essence, whereas instead he is talking about a completely subordinate essence, namely the human essence, which he thus makes into something higher and nobler. Instead of having *you* in mind — the essence, you, you who are an essence, instead he concerns himself with the human being as "your essence" and has the human being in mind instead of you. Stirner uses the word essence, for example on page 56, saying: "You, yourself, with *your* essence, are of value to me, for your essence is not something higher, it is not higher and more universal than you. It is unique, as you are, because it is you." — [end of Stirner's insertion] is your I not *masculine*? Can you sever masculinity from what is called mind? Isn't your brain, the most sacred and elevated organ of your body, definitively masculine? Are your feelings, your thoughts unmanly? Are you merely a *male animal*, a dog, an ape, a stallion? What else is your unique, incomparable, and consequently sexless I, but an undigested residue of the old christian supernaturalism?"

If Stirner had said: You are *more* than a living essence or *animal*, this would mean, you are *still an animal*, but animality does not exhaust what you are. In the same way, he says: "You are more than a human being, therefore you are *also* a human being; you are more than a male, but you are *also* a male; but humanity and masculinity do not express you exhaustively, and you can therefore be indifferent to everything that is held up to you as 'true humanity' or 'true masculinity.' But you can always be tortured and have tortured yourself with these pretentious duties. Still today, holy people intend to grab hold of you with them." Feuerbach is certainly no mere animal male, but then is he nothing more than a human male? Did he write *The Essence of Christianity* as a male, and did he require nothing more than to be a male to write this book? Instead, wasn't this *unique* Feuerbach needed for that, and could even another Feuerbach, Friedrich, for example — who is still also a male — have brought it off? Since he is *this* unique Feuerbach, he is also, at the same time, a human being, a male, a living essence, a Franconian, etc. But he is more than all this, since these attributes have reality only through his uniqueness. He is a unique male, a unique human being, etc.; indeed, he is an *incomparable* male, an *incomparable* human being.

So what does Feuerbach want with his "*consequently* sexless I"? Since Feuerbach is *more* than male, is he consequently sexless? Feuerbach's holiest, most elevated organ is undoubtedly manly, definitively manly, and it is also, among other things, Caucasian, German, etc. But all this is only true, because it is a *unique thing*, a distinct, unique thing, an organ or brain which will not come

forth a second time anywhere in the world, however full the world may be of organs, of organs as such or of absolute organs.

And is this unique Feuerbach supposed to be "an undigested residue of old christian supernaturalism"?

From this, it is also quite clear that Stirner does not, as Feuerbach says, "separate his I in thought from his sensible, male essence" just as the refutation Feuerbach makes on page 200 of [Wigand's] Quarterly would collapse if Feuerbach didn't present the unique wrongly, as lacking individuality as he depicts it as sexless.

"To realize the species means to actualize an arrangement, a capacity, a determination for human nature generally." Rather, the species is already realized through this arrangement; whereas what you make of this arrangement is a realization of your own. Your hand is fully realized for the purposes of the species, otherwise it wouldn't be a hand, but perhaps a paw. But when you train your hands, you do not perfect them for the purposes of the species, you do not realize the species that is already real and perfect, because your hand is what the species or the species-concept of "hand" implies, and is thus a perfect hand — but you make of them what and how you want and are able to make them; you shape your will and power into them; you make the species hand into your own, *unique*, particular hand.

"Good is what accords with the human being, what fits it; bad, despicable, what contradicts it. Ethical relationships, e.g., marriage, are thus not sacred for their own sake, but only for the sake of human beings, because they are relationships between human beings, and thus are the self-affirmation, the self-enjoyment of the human essence." But what if one were an inhuman monster who didn't think these ethical relations were fitting for *him*? Feuerbach will demonstrate to him that they are fitting for the human being, the "actual sensual, individual human essence," and so also must fit *him*. This demonstration is so thorough and practical that already for thousands of years, it has populated the prisons with "inhuman monsters," i.e., with people who did not find fitting *for them* what was nonetheless fitting for the "human essence."

Of course, Feuerbach is not a materialist (Stirner never says he is, but only speaks of his materialism clothed with the property of idealism); he is not a materialist, because, although he imagines that he is talking about the actual human being, he doesn't say a thing about it. But he is also not an idealist, because though he constantly talks about the human essence, an idea, he makes out that he is talking about the "sensual human essence." He claims to be neither a materialist not an idealist, and I'll grant him this. But we will also grant what he himself wants to be, and passes himself off as, in the end: he is a "common man, a communist." Stirner has already seen him as such, e.g., p 413.

About the point upon which alone this all would hang, namely Stirner's assertion that the human essence is not Feuerbach's or Stirner's or any other particular human being's essence, just as the cards are not the essence of the house of cards; Feuerbach circles about this point, indeed, he doesn't get it at all. He sticks with his categories of species and individual, I and thou, human being and human essence, with complete complacency.

Hess

Hess has the "historical development of German philosophy behind him" in his pamphlet, "The Last Philosophers," but has before him "the development of the philosophers Feuerbach,

Bruno Bauer and Stirner, disengaged from life" and knows from his own development, not exactly disengaged from life, that the development of these philosophers "had to turn into nonsense." But is a development disengaged from life not "nonsense," and is a development not disengaged from life not likewise "nonsense"? But, no, he has sense, because he flatters the sense of the great masses which imagine that underneath the philosopher there is always one who understands nothing of life.

Hess begins this way: "It never occurs to anyone to maintain that the astronomer is the solar system that he has understood. But the individual human being, who has understood nature and history, is supposed to be the species, the all, according to our last German philosophers." But how, if the latter also never occurs to anyone? Who has ever said that the individual human being is the species because he has "understood" nature and history? Hess has said this and no one else. He even cites Stirner as a reference, here: "As the individual is all nature, so is he also the whole species." But did Stirner say that the individual first had to *understand* in order to be able to be the entire species? Rather, Hess, this individual, actually is the entire "human" species and can serve, with skin and hair, as a source for Stirner's statement. What would Hess be if he were not perfectly human, if he lacked even the smallest thing for being human? He could be anything except a human being; — he could be an angel, a beast or a depiction of a human being, but he can only be a human being if he is a perfect human being. The human being can be no more perfect than Hess is, there is no more perfect human being than — Hess. Hess is the perfect human being, or if one wants to use the superlative, the most perfect human being. Everything, all that belongs to the human being is in Hess. Not even the smallest crumb of what makes a human being human is missing in Hess. Of course, the case is similar for every goose, every dog, every horse.

So is there no human being more perfect than Hess? As a human being — none. As a human being, Hess is as perfect as — every human being, and the human species contains nothing that Hess does not contain; he carries it all around with him.

Here is another fact, that Hess is not just a human being, but an utterly *unique* human being. However, this uniqueness never benefits the human being, because the human being can never become more perfect than it is. — We don't want to go into this further, since what is said above is enough to show how strikingly Hess can find Stirner guilty of "nonsense" simply with an "understood solar system." In an even clearer way, on page 11 of his pamphlet, Hess exposes Stirner's "nonsense" and shouts with satisfaction: "This is the logic of the new wisdom!"

Hess's expositions on the development of Christianity, as socialist historical intuitions, don't matter here; his characterization of Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer is utterly the sort that would have to come from one who has "laid philosophy aside."

He says of socialism that "it carries out the realization and negation of philosophy seriously and speaks not only of that, but of philosophy as a mere apprenticeship to negate and to realize in social life." He could have also added that socialism wants to "realize" not only philosophy, but also religion and Christianity. Nothing easier than this, when, like Hess, one knows life, in particular the misery of life. When the manufacturer, Hardy, in *The Wandering Jew*, falls into misery, he is completely open to the teachings of the Jesuits, particularly when he could hear all the same teachings, but in a "human," melodious form, from the "human" priest Gabriel. Gabriel's lessons are more pernicious than Rodin's.

Hess quotes a passage from Stirner's book, page 341, and deduces from it that Stirner has nothing against "practically existing egoism, except the lack of consciousness of egoism." But

Stirner doesn't at all say what Hess makes him say, that "all the errors of present day egoists consist in not being conscious of their egoism." In the passage cited, Stirner says: "If only the consciousness of this existed." Of what? Not of egoism, but of the fact that grabbing is not a sin. And after twisting Stirner's words, Hess dedicates the entire second half of his pamphlet to the struggle against "conscious egoism." Stirner says in the middle of the passage that Hess quotes: "One should simply know this, that the technique of grabbing is not contemptible, but the clear act in which some egoists agree *among themselves* to express themselves." Hess omits this, because he has no more understanding of egoists agreeing *among themselves* than what Marx already said earlier about shopkeepers and universal rights (for example in the *Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern*); Hess repeats this, but with none of the keen skill of his predecessor. — Stirner's "conscious egoist" doesn't merely not adhere to the consciousness of sin, but also to the consciousness of law, or of universal human rights.

Hess finishes with Stirner like this: "No, you precocious child, I don't at all create and love in order to enjoy, I love from love, I create from a creator's desire, from a vital instinct, from an immediate natural desire. When I love in order to enjoy, then I not only do not love, but I also do not enjoy, etc." But does Stirner challenge such trivialities anywhere? Doesn't Hess rather attribute "nonsense" to him in order to be able to call him a "precocious child"? In other words, "Precocious child" is the final judgment to which Hess comes, and he repeats it in the conclusion. Through such final judgments, he manages to put "the historical development of German philosophy *behind him*."

On page 14, Hess lets "the species break up into individuals, families, tribes, people, races." This disintegration, he says, "this alienation is the first form of the existence of the species. To come into existence, the species must individualize itself." From whence only Hess knows all that the species "must" do. "Form of existence of the species, alienation of the species, individualization of the species," he gets all this from the philosophy that he has put *behind him*, and to top it off, commits his beloved "robbery with murder" insofar as he "robs" this, for example, from Feuerbach and at the same time "murders" everything in it that is actually philosophy. He could have learned precisely from Stirner that the pompous phrase "alienation of the species" is "nonsense," but where could he have gotten the weapons against Stirner if not from philosophy, which he has put behind him, of course, through a socialist "robbery with murder" — ?

Hess closes the second part of his book with the discovery that "Stirner's ideal is bourgeois society, which takes the state to itself ." Hegel has shown that egoism is at home in bourgeois society. Whoever has now put Hegelian philosophy behind him, also knows, from this philosophy behind him, that anyone who "recommends" egoism has his ideal in bourgeois society. He will later take the opportunity to speak extensively about bourgeois society; then it will seem that it is no more the site of egoism than the family is the site of selflessness. The sense of bourgeois society is rather the *life of commerce*, a life that can be pursued by saints in sacred forms — as happens all the time today — as by egoists in an egoistic form — as happens now only in the activity of a few acting clandestinely. For Stirner, bourgeois society does not at all lie at the heart, and he doesn't at all think of extending it so that it engulfs the state and the family. So Hess could suspect such a thing about Stirner only because he came to him through Hegelian categories.

The selfless Hess has become accustomed to a particular, gainful and advantageous phrase by noting repeatedly that the poor Berliners get hold of their wisdom from the Rhine, i.e., from Hess and the socialists there, and also from France, but unfortunately through stupidity, these beautiful things get ruined. So, for example, he says: "Recently, there has been talk of the em-

bodied individual *among us*; the actual human being, the realization of the idea, so that it can be no surprise to us if tidings of it have reached Berlin and there have moved certain philosophical heads from their bliss. But the philosophical heads have understood the thing *philosophically*." — We had to mention this so much to spread what is, for us, a well-deserved reputation; we add also that already in the *Rhenish Gazette*, although not in "recent times," the actual human being and similar topics were *spoken* about a lot, and exclusively by Rhenish correspondents.

Immediately thereafter, Hess wants "to make what he means by the actual, living human being conceivable to philosophers." Since he wants to make it *conceivable*, he reveals that *his* actual human being is a *concept*, thus not an actual human being. Rather, Hess himself is an actual human being, but we want to grant him what he *means* by an actual human being, since on the Rhine ("among us"), they *speak* about it enough.

Stirner says: "If you consume what is sacred, you have made it property! You digest the host and you get rid of it!" Hess answers: "As if we haven't consumed our sacred property for a long time!" Of course, we consumed property as a sacred thing, a *sacred* property; but we did not consume its sacredness. Stirner says: "If you consume *what is sacred* (Hess doesn't take this with much precision and makes Stirner say "sacred property" instead of "what is sacred"), you make it property, etc.," i.e., something (dirt, for example) that you can throw away. "Reason and love are generally without reality," Hess makes Stirner say. But doesn't he speak of *my* reason, *my* love? In me they are real, they have reality.

"We may not develop our essence from the inside out," Stirner is supposed to say. Of course, you may develop your essence, but "our essence," "the human essence," that is another thing, which the whole first part of the book deals with. Anyway, Hess again makes no distinction between your essence and our essence, and in doing so, follows Feuerbach.

Stirner is accused of knowing only the beginnings of socialism, and even these only through hearsay, otherwise he would have to know, for example, that on the political terrain communism has already been divided for quite some time into the two extremes of egoism (intérêt personnel[6]) and humanism (dévouement[7]). This contrast that is so important for Hess, who may possibly know a thousand more things *about* socialism than Stirner, although the latter has seen through socialism better, was subordinated by Stirner, and could only have seemed important to him if his thinking about egoism was as thoroughly unclear as that of Hess.

The fact that Stirner, by the way, "knows nothing of society" is something that all socialist and communists understand, and there is no need for Hess to prove it. If Stirner had known anything about it, how could he have dared to write against Your Holiness, and what's more, to write so ruthlessly, in so much detail!

Anyone who hasn't read Stirner's book immediately recognizes without question how precisely he judged and how little he needed to justify the following judgment: "Stirner's opposition to the state is the utterly common opposition of the liberal bourgeoisies who put the blame on the state when people fall into poverty and starve."

Hess reprimands Stirner like this: "Oh, unique, you are great, original, brilliant! But I would have been glad to see your 'union of egoists', even if only on paper. Since this isn't granted to me, I will allow myself to characterize the real *concept* of your union of egoists." He wants to characterize the "concept" of this union, indeed, he does characterize it; saying authoritatively

[6] "personal interest," in French in the original — translator

[7] "devotion," in French in the original — translator

that it is "the concept of introducing now in life the most uncouth form of egoism, *wildness*." Since the "concept" of this union is what interests him, he also explains that he wants to see it on paper. As he sees in the unique nothing but a concept, so naturally, this union, in which the unique is the vital point, also had to become a concept for him. But if one repeats Hess's own words to him: "Recently, there has been talk of the unique among us, and tidings of it have also reached Köln; but the philosophical head in Köln has understood the thing philosophically," has a concept been preserved?

But he goes further and shows that "all our history up to now has been nothing but the history of egoistic unions, whose fruit — ancient slavery, medieval bondage and modern, fundamental, universal servitude — are known to us all." First of all, here Hess puts "egoistic union" — because he needs to take it in precisely this way! — in place of Stirner's "union of egoists." His readers, who he wants to persuade — one sees in his preface what type of people he has to persuade, namely people whose works, like those of Bruno Bauer, derive from an "incitement to reaction," in other words, exceptionally smart and political heads) — these readers, of course, immediately find it correct and beyond doubt that nothing but "egoistic unions" has ever existed. — But is a union in which most of those involved are hoodwinked about their most natural and obvious interests, a union of egoists? Have "egoists" come together where one is the slave or serf of the other? There are, it's true, egoists in such a society, and in this sense, it might in some aspects be called an "egoistic union"; but the slaves have not really sought this society from egoism, and are instead, in their egoistic hearts, against these lovely "unions," as Hess calls them. — Societies in which the needs of some get satisfied at the expense of others, in which, for example, some can satisfy their need for rest only by making others work until they are exhausted; or lead comfortable lives by making others live miserably or perhaps even starve; or live the high life because others are so addle-brained as to live in want, etc. — Hess calls such societies egoistic unions, and since he is free "of the secret police of his critical conscience," impartially and against police orders, he identifies this egoistic league *of his* with Stirner's union of egoists. Stirner probably also needs the expression "egoistic union," but it is explained first of all through the "union of egoists," and secondly, it is explained correctly, whereas what Hess called by this name is rather a religious society, a community held in sacred respect through rights, laws and all the formalities or ceremonies of justice.

It would be another thing indeed, if Hess wanted to see egoistic unions not on paper, but in life. Faust finds himself in the midst of such a union when he cries: "Here I am human, here I can be human" — Goethe says it in black and white. If Hess attentively observed real life, to which he holds so much, he will see hundreds of such egoistic unions, some passing quickly, others lasting. Perhaps at this very moment, some children have come together just outside his window in a friendly game. If he looks at them, he will see a playful egoistic union. Perhaps Hess has a friend or a beloved; then he knows how one heart finds another, as their two hearts unite egoistically to delight (enjoy) each other, and how no one "comes up short" in this. Perhaps he meets a few good friends on the street and they ask him to accompany them to a tavern for wine; does he go along as a favor to them, or does he "unite" with them because it promises pleasure? Should they thank him heartily for the "sacrifice," or do they know that all together they form an "egoistic union" for a little while?

To be sure, Hess wouldn't pay attention to these trivial examples, they are so utterly physical and vastly distinct from sacred society, or rather from the "fraternal, human society" of sacred socialists.

Hess says of Stirner: "he remains constantly under the secret police of his critical conscience." What is he saying here, if not that when Stirner criticizes, he doesn't want to go on a binge of critique, to babble, but really just wants to criticize? Hess, however, would like to show how right he is in not being able to find any difference between Stirner and Bruno Bauer. But has he ever generally known how to find any difference other than that between sacred socialists and "egoistic shopkeepers"? And is even this difference anything more than histrionics? What need does he have to find a difference between Bruno Bauer and Stirner, since critique is undoubtedly — critique? Why, one might ask, does Hess have to concern himself with such strange birds, in whom, only with great difficult, will he ever find sense except by attributing *his own* senseto them, as he did in his pamphlet, and who, therefore, (as he says in his preface) "had to turn into nonsense" — why since he has such a wide human field of the most human action before him?

* * *

To close, it might not be inappropriate to remind the critics of Feuerbach's *Critique of the Anti-Hegel*, page 4.[8]

[8] Perhaps a reference to this appropriate passage: "He always has other things than his opponent in his head. He cannot assimilate his ideas and consequently cannot make them out with his understanding. They move in confusion like Epicurian atoms in the empty space of his own self. And his understanding is the accident that brings them together with special external expedient accents into an apparent whole." — translator's note

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Max Stirner
Stirner's Critics
1845

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Translated by Wolfi Landstreicher | Published by Little Black Cart here.

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